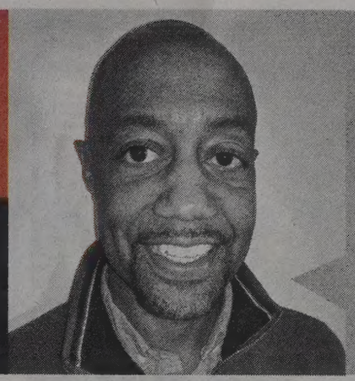
THIS IS OUR HOUSE

By Craig Washington

Regarding Henri McTerry

Craig Washington is a writer, storyteller, angelic troublemaker and an HIV-positive conqueror.



"Henri was 69 years old. I wish that I had made more time to spend with him. I regret not doing more to hand him his well-earned roses while he was still here."

"It was all about being free to express yourself and have a good time."

- Henri McTerry

Years before I joined the reverse migration South, Atlanta had been dubbed the new Black gay mecca. Within a year of my arrival in 1992, I was introduced to activists and artists who welcomed me into their fold. They also taught me about others who laid foundations for them. Long before storied clubs such as Traxx opened their doors, black gay society was active yet constricted. There were hidden figures whose social functions and networks expanded community structure. They opened windows and closed doors through which "the children" could come out, gather and play. Known as the Father of Atlanta Black Pride, Henri McTerry was at the vanguard of this movement. On Feb. 18, this towering bon vivant passed away, leaving a legacy as unique as the dashing character he displayed in life.

Henri was one of the city's most successful event organizers from the late '70s throughout the '80s. The Atlanta native was an early architect for Black LGBTQ nightlife in Atlanta. He was widely recognized for the gala Labor Day picnics he organized from 1976 – 1988. By the mid-'80s, the events would draw on average more than 500 attendees, mostly gay men from across the US to his spacious backyard in Decatur.

His parties magnetized Atlanta and the growing convergence was eventually transformed into the nation's largest Black Pride. From 1984 – 87, Henri organized a popular Friday night social known as Skirts, hosted at Alexander's, a restaurant in the "Southern Bell" building. As a young novice DJ, Keith Stephens watched Henri prepare events and was inspired.

"He knew how to get the permits, the sponsorships. He really knew how to put things together," Stephens said.

As a young man, Henri studied at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City. The man had style. His events were polished affairs asserting the sensibility that his people deserved quality experiences.

Henri was highly supportive of fellow organizers, especially younger men like David Hampton and DJ Keith Stephens. Hampton was a founding member of the Ritz Boys, and his efforts elevated Traxx's prominence.

Beyond his public works, Henri was a caretaker by nature. He relocated to Washington, D.C. to help AIDS organizations improve services for HIV-positive clients. He donated his own time and money helping friends to hang on, or die with dignity. He did so without seeking attention or reward.

Henri was 69 years old. I wish that I had made more time to spend with him. I regret not doing more to hand him his well-earned roses while he was still here. This writing is an overdue homage to a gifted brother who gave far more than he was credited for. Thank you for my community, Henri.

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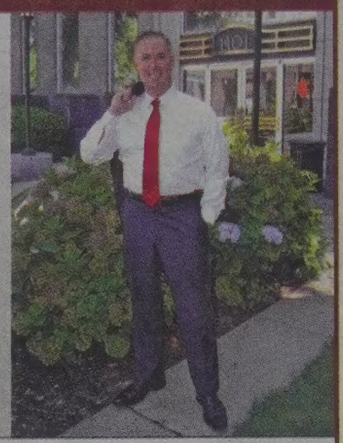

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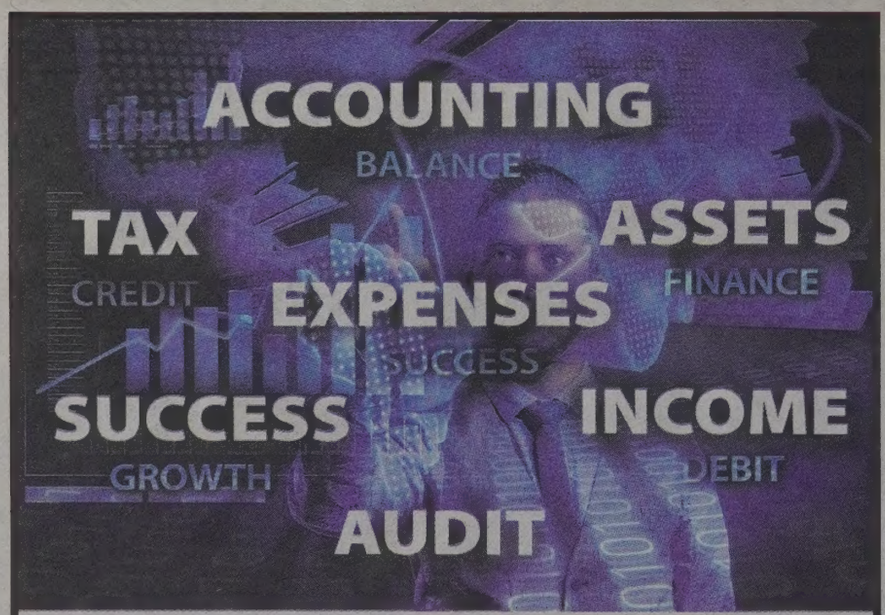

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ABOUT OUR COVER ARTIST,

Cameron Lee

Atlanta newcomer presenting upcoming queer art showcase at Revelator Coffee

By **PATRICK SAUNDERS**
psaunders@thegavoice.com

When artist Cameron Lee and his husband, social media influencer, blogger and creative curator Rigel Cable, moved to Atlanta via Hollywood last summer, it didn't take long for them to make their mark on the scene. Cable launched his first Atlanta event, the Atlanta Queer Creatives Panel Discussion, that November at Ponce City Market, and the pair will present SPECTRA: Queer Art Showcase on Friday, March 23 at Revelator Coffee Company in West Midtown.

That night, Lee will unveil four new artworks from his galaxy-inspired collection, featuring portraits of influencers from Los Angeles, and the showcase will also include works from his art show "Flores Fatales." One of the pieces from Flores Fatales — featuring transgender L.A. model Amanda Cardona — graces the March 16 cover of Georgia Voice.

"She is so striking and has an intense energy about her that I knew would read well on camera," Lee told Georgia Voice. "My image of her was selected to be shown at L.A. Art Show this year as part of a queer artist exhibit, and in many ways she has become the face of the Flores Fatales series. Her image is an ode to one of my favorite artists, Frida Kahlo."

Other local queer artists selected by Lee for SPECTRA include Jon Dean, LaRue Caillet, Savana Ogburn, Shanisia Person and Taylor Alxndr. The artists will receive 100 percent of any sales they make, which can be a rarity at such events.

"The current art model at galleries or events usually ends up charging the artists not only a large commission but a fee for wall space on top of it. This model prevents a lot of artists from being seen because they simply can't afford to show their work, on top of the costs of all the supplies, framing and time they put into it their art," Lee said. "Queer people are already a disenfranchised community, and as a queer artist I know firsthand the difficulties of funding your own artwork, trying to get it seen and staying true to your vision, even if society tells you it may not be appropriate. Queer people have such unique perspectives that I feel the rest of the world needs to see and embrace more."

Cameron Lee and his husband, Rigel Cable, moved to Atlanta from Hollywood last summer. (Courtesy photo)

Details

SPECTRA: Queer Art Showcase
Friday, March 23 from 8 p.m. – 11 p.m.
Revelator Coffee Company
691 14th St. N.W., Atlanta, GA 30318
www.facebook.com/events/1976522592607437

THIS IS OUR HOUSE

By Craig Washington

A reflection on Aretha

Craig Washington is a writer, storyteller, angelic troublemaker and an HIV-positive conqueror.

"Like many queer little boys betrayed by adolescence, I was lonely and terrified. When she closed her eyes, reared her head back and soared, I would be lifted high above my constrictions."

I am a child of the late 60s and early 70s. My people's ongoing struggle for liberation was catapulted straight into the nation's living room through newspaper headlines and evening-television bulletins. In homes throughout Black America, the artists were considered no less essential to our uplift than activists, pastors and teachers. There was a fervent dialectic between artist and community that fit those demanding times.

By 1967, as her second Atlantic album title pronounced, Aretha Franklin had arrived achieving international fame. That summer would be coined by Ebony Magazine as the "the summer of 'Retha, Rap and Revolt."

The newly crowned Queen of Soul delivered hit after hit that resonated deeply with Black people, speaking directly to the collective by voicing our demands and desires. Some registered as subversive anthems ("Respect," "Think") that challenged inequalities of gender and race within and beyond the contexts of romantic relationships. In our home, she was an abiding presence, usually referred to by first name like a next-door neighbor. While listening to Aretha, my mother would affirm a line, "His name is Doctor Feelgood in the morning" with spirited cheers like, "Tell 'em, Ree" and, "You better sing, girl!" I loved witnessing the impromptu rituals in which Ma joined the visiting sisters adding spoken word to the call-and-response chorus. I marveled at the bonding language with which these women shared testimony across boundaries of space and time to recount universal narratives of love, lust, loss and redemption.

Aretha's singing reached inside my being like a presence that recognized me and articulated all that my tangled soul could not express. Like many queer little boys betrayed by adolescence, I was lonely and terrified. When she closed her eyes, reared her head back and soared, I would be lifted high above my constrictions. As I matured, I came to understand the lessons in those lyrics and the immense feeling she embedded in them.

As an HIV-positive older Black gay man, I count such icons as jewels in the paid-for crown James Baldwin claimed I have only to wear on my head. Above all of them, I chose Aretha as my principal muse. Twenty years ago, I named my first HIV prevention program after her house classic remake "Deeper Love." The name expressed what I wanted Black gay men to rediscover and celebrate in congregation.

Last year, she announced her semi-retirement and plans to open a nightclub in her Detroit hometown. The reports about her health issues worry me and I pray that she is enjoying her own life. Through the loss of my mother, who loved her madly, and all the tribulations this life brings, Aretha has been by my side step by step. As "Bridge Over Troubled Water" opens, her backup singers harken, "Don't trouble the water" and she complies, "I won't." Toward the song's end, in response to the repeated plea, she reminds her good sisters, "Said I wouldn't!" Thank you, Aretha, for keeping your promise.

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Gay Atlanta pioneer turns 74

Activist Berl Boykin reflects on 50-plus years of the struggle for LGBTQ equality

By DALLAS ANNE DUNCAN

The Atlanta LGBTQ community gathered on April 7 to celebrate activist and gay rights pioneer Berl Boykin's 74th birthday. Boykin was a co-founder of The Georgia Mattachine Society and the Georgia Gay Liberation Front. He also helped organize the city's first Pride march, among many other accomplishments. (Photos courtesy Jeff Quigley)

On April 7, Atlanta's LGBTQ community gathered to celebrate Berl Boykin's birthday.

It's been 74 years well-lived for the Miami-born gay pioneer, whose activism helped lead the city's fight for LGBTQ equality as far back as 1963. That was the year Boykin was expelled from Emory University because of his sexuality.

"The dorm counselor had a skeleton key and came in on me at the wrong moment. So they gave me 48 hours to get off the campus," Boykin told Georgia Voice. "It was a different world then."

The sudden end to his collegiate career launched Boykin's path in a new direction. Together with his band of LGBTQ brethren and straight allies, he battled on behalf of his community so that one day, no one would face this treatment because of their sexuality or gender identity.

"I can't remember when I actually met him, but I always knew who he was," said gay Atlanta historian Dave Hayward, founder of Touching Up Our Roots. "It was really a collective movement and Berl was one of the key people, but we all really participated."

THE SUMMER OF '69

"It was like being a part of any other persecuted and prosecuted minority. You fought back as you could and when you could, because you pretty well had to," Boykin said. "No one else is going to take up for you, so I did."

Boykin credits the civil rights movement and black activists of the day with helping to inspire the push for LGBTQ equality. Though he and the late Shelby Cullum had previously founded The Georgia Mattachine Society to support gay rights, push came to shove in August 1969 after an Atlanta theater was raided by the police during a showing of the Andy Warhol film "The Lonesome Cowboys," just a few months after the Stonewall riots in New York.

"We decided to have a meeting to see if we could organize a Georgia Gay Liberation Front like the one that was in New York at that point," Boykin said. "We were popping mad. People were jumping up and down with anger."

The next spring, members tabled at Piedmont Park during the Arts Festival and "distributed propaganda that we'd printed off." The following summer, Boykin and his Georgia Gay Liberation Front members took to sidewalks.

"I certainly never thought, when I was organizing the first gay Pride march here, that it would get up to 300,000 strong. We had 125 people the first time in 1971 by actual count," Boykin said.

He should know — he counted twice.

"We could not get a parade permit from the city," Boykin said. "We marched up Peachtree from the Federal Building downtown … by the Baptist church at 5th and Peachtree, just as they were getting out of church and they were freaked out."

The march continued to 14th Street and then on to Piedmont Park, where the 125 marchers gathered for speeches. Boykin served as grand marshal for that event.

CONFRONTING GOV. CARTER

Years after his activism began, Boykin was honored by the Georgia Legislature. One of the sections in the House resolution commended him for being among three men to present "the first official petition to a sitting Georgia governor for lesbian and gay equal rights under the law."

Boykin, joined by the late activists Klaus Smith and Bill Smith, met with then-Gov. Jimmy Carter on July 14, 1971. It was Bastille Day, and they had a bone to pick.

"For the first time in the history of Georgia, [Carter] outlawed lesbianism," Boykin said. "He instituted a 20-year prison sentence for sodomy for lesbianism. He did reduce the male sentence from 30 to 20 years."

Though they were unable to get any women to join them that day, the three went to visit Carter during his open office hours.

"He wasn't expecting us, but there we were. We demanded that he lend his voice to a repeal of that law," Boykin said.

The governor didn't give in at the time, but there is a sequel.

"A few years back, we had an amendment here in Georgia that was against any pro-gay law being passed. That year I wrote a letter to Jimmy Carter, along with Dave Hayward, and I pointed out what I just went over," Boykin said. "At a vital juncture in 2004, he came out and supported civil unions, which I know is half-cake and sort of superceded now, but it was vital at the time to have the support from a prominent public voice. I'm proud that I could do that much by just writing a letter and putting a guilt trip on him."

IGNITING A FIRE

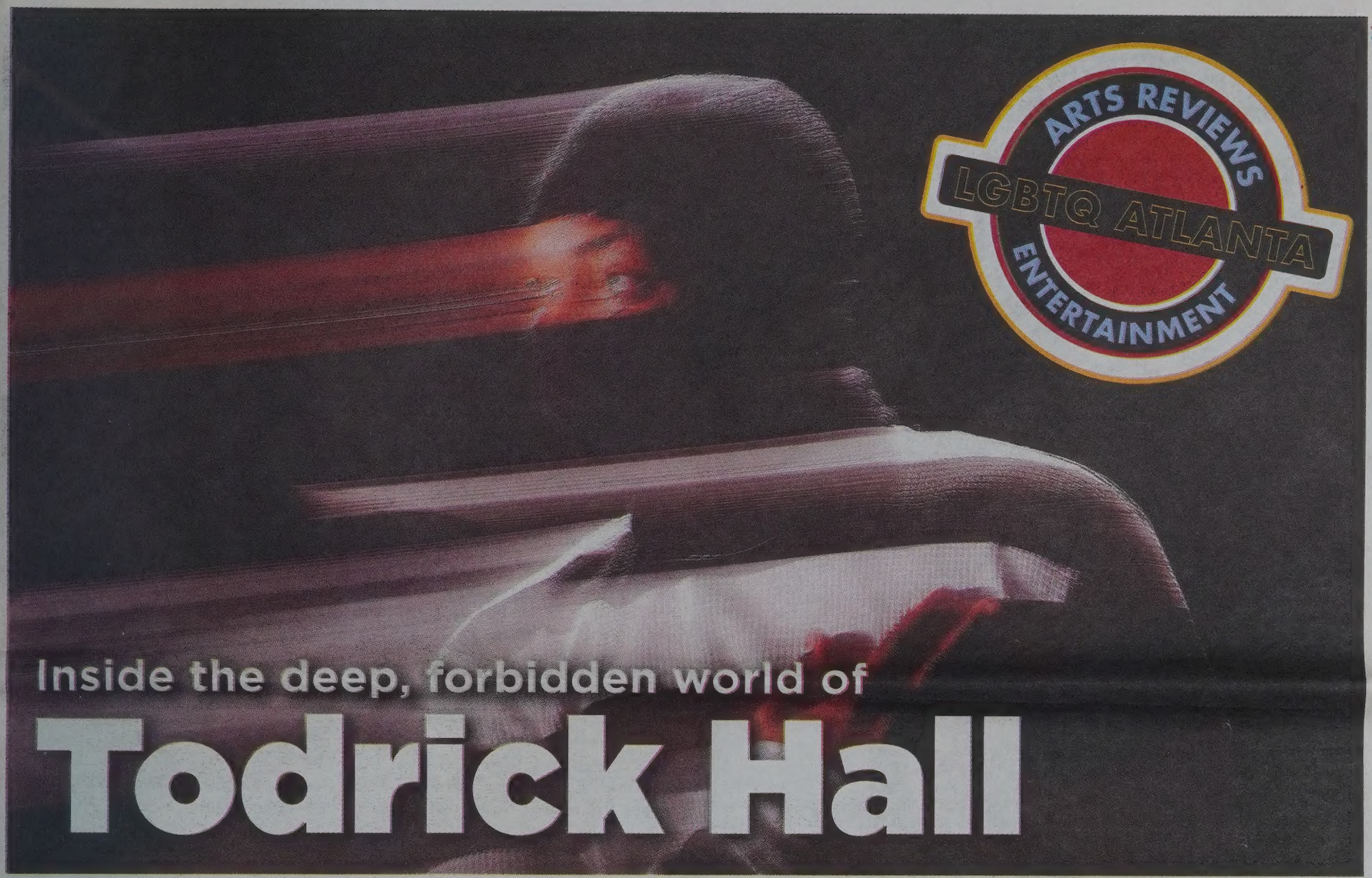
"We're a long way from full equality, because even with the things we achieved, there's still a lot of racial prejudice, still a lot of prejudice against gay people in society and it still has to be struggled against, or they'll put us right back in the closet," Boykin said. "The eternal struggle is the price of liberty. I think it's a price worth paying."

In the heyday of his activism — which was peppered between writing jobs for the alt-newspaper The Great Speckled Bird, delivering film, living in England, writing a book, working for public radio and radio theater — there was a key group taking charge of LGBTQ rights in Atlanta. Boykin had friends who were killed for their beliefs and their sexuality. The groups he was part of fizzled and factioned, but their fiery spirits never wavered.

"If you were out, you were generally out and doing something," Boykin said. "Today, people get together at Pride, and then for the most part they disappear into the woodwork."

That's one reason he believes LGBTQ Atlanta shouldn't forget its roots.

"People need to know now, younger gay people, how bad the oppression was in the old days and how it had to be fought against for people to even get to the relative state of liberation we're in now," he said. "Never forget the struggle. Our enemies won't, and they will definitely have the energy to push us back. … Struggle on until you get more freedom in each aspect. … Until we get full equality, every way with straight people, no more, no less, things are not over."



Inside the deep, forbidden world of

Todrick Hall

YouTube superstar talks about ambitious visual album, his "Idol" days, race and his loudest critics

By J. MATTHEW COBB

When Todrick Hall made his splash on season nine of "American Idol," he assailed the boring status quo by forcing ballsy renditions of pop favorites into the mix. He admits it wasn't enough. "My biggest regret was that when I was on 'Idol,' I held back so much," Hall, 33, explained by phone on one of his tour stops in Indianapolis. "I wanted to perform Britney Spears' 'Circus' with a ringleader costume on. Maybe I would've got booed off the stage, but my biggest regret is that I didn't do it, that I didn't come out swinging, but gave a half-assed version of what I wanted to give. I played it safe."

Today Hall is breaking, or rewriting, every rule of convention, and he's winning. With over a million followers on Instagram and 544 million views on his YouTube videos alone, he stands tall as one of the most influential artists in LGBTQ entertainment. He's done legit Broadway ("Kinky Boots," "Chicago"), choreographed parts of the "Blow" music video for Beyonce, cameoed in a music video with bestie Taylor Swift and dropped a star-studded visual album "Straight Outta Oz." He's gal-palling with RuPaul as a guest judge and part-time choreographer for the competing queens on "RuPaul's Drag Race."

He calls "Drag Race" his favorite gig all year, although he wants to offer more to the Emmy Award-winning hit show. "I don't wanna step on anybody's toes or come for somebody's gig, but I would love to actually write a musical [for it], 'cause when I write my musicals, it inspires what I'm gonna do choreographically and how I'm gonna produce it," he said.

An important footnote: Hall has achieved all of this entirely as an independent artist — no label, absolutely all on his own. "It was initially my goal to do things the conventional way, and it wasn't until recently that I actually started being proud of the fact that I have done it another way, because I used to always crave mainstream success and being part of a system. But when you knock on enough doors and you get enough 'no's' and doors slammed in your face, you realize you only have two options: You can give up or you keep knocking on doors or build your own house, so I won't have this problem anymore. And that's kinda what I did."

Videos, tour court controversy

Now Hall is hitting the road for the 50-city international tour "Todrick Hall American" to promote his latest visual album, the 20-track "Forbidden." The tour, slated to unpack at the Fox Theatre on May 6, is described by Hall as being "a hybrid; a musical mixed with a concert." Like his previous project, "Forbidden" is a super-stacked visual album done in the spirit of indie cinema and theater — think of Beyoncé's infamous self-titled visual album. It's packed with star cameos and collaborations ranging from RuPaul to Shangela, from Jenifer Lewis to Tiffany Haddish, from Tamar Braxton to Brandy. The road version won't be as star-studded, but Hall promises it'll be just as enthralling. "There's over 100 costumes that we spent a lot of time and money on, a lot of tender love and care and picking out the fabrics, a lot of choreography and the set is really cool. It's just a really, really fun time.

CONTINUES ON PAGE **20**

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CONTINUED FROM **PAGE 19**

Very positive and uplifting."

But Hall is getting some vitriol and very sharp reactions from the black community on social media. That's because "Forbidden" is by far his most ballsy and controversial project yet. It explores an alternate universe where Hall plays Nolan in a coming-of-age narrative that explores sexuality, gender, race and even the price of fame. The uploaded music video of "T.H.U.G. (Trade)," taken directly from the film, piles up the fetishes on black men. And the video for the perky "Ordinary Day" shows off a bizarro world where a street sign spells "Trayvon" backwards and an innocent white kid is gunned down by a black cop, brushed aside by witnesses in a '60s-era suburb. At first glance, these disturbing images in Hall's art pose a level of grave concern for those who mistakenly view Hall as the stereotypical, squeaky-clean safe artist, but Hall isn't holding back on his creativity and vision, which explains one of the reasons why Hall remains independent. "I went to several people with billions of dollars to spend on original content, and I told them I wanted to write this," he said. "They were just so afraid to do it."

Some of the criticism Hall is just learning about, and he understands some of it. "Well, in some ways I would agree with [them]," Hall responded. "I think it's kinda ridiculous that people fetishize guys in that way, but that's the beautiful irony of this album. I am singing that song as Nolan, that character. But there are people who are literally like that. That's what they want. That's who they are. That's what they look for."

To remedy some of the hazy confusion, Hall feels people need to watch the visual album in its entirety. "The whole reason why I say my name [Nolan] at the beginning and put it on a wanted sign is because I was hoping that people would watch it and say this character is being taught to go after this person. I think if people watched the album in context, they would probably understand that."

'I am very proud to be black'

But Hall also knows there's more work to be done, acknowledging the insecurities most people, even the gay community, have about race and interracial dating. "I'm always criticized or ridiculed as being a black guy who doesn't stand for black people," he said, as if he's getting a heavy weight off his chest. "I am very proud to be black. I try to express myself in what I have to say about Black Lives Matter and racial issues through my music, but I'm not trying to prove to people that I'm black because anybody that knows me knows that I'm fucking black. They don't even know how many guys that I wanted to date would not date me because they literally told me they don't black men."

And yes, he's aware some of the backlash is coming from haters, from those angry over his close relationship with Taylor Swift, from those who recall his previous ex (who is white), from those who feel he's too vanilla to be black. "It's really just laughable to me that people would think that I exclusively date white men," he said. "It's absolutely not the case. It's just crazy to me how it's perceived online, and I understand why they would think that, but they don't know me. And until they meet me, they have no idea."

Hall is addressing his critics and more determined to stay vocal about his beliefs and experiences, while creatively injecting relevant hot-button issues through his music. Using the vernacular of the kids, he's woke AF.

And America has a chance to meet him, one tour stop at a time.

Todrick Hall has done Broadway, appeared in and choreographed music videos for major artists, dropped star-studded visual albums and been a guest judge on 'RuPaul's Drag Race.' (Courtesy photo)

Details

Todrick Hall American
Sunday, May 6 at 7 p.m.
Fox Theatre
Tickets $48-$75
www.foxtheatre.org/events/detail/todrick-hall-american

OUT OF DARKNESS: TWO REMAIN

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Abundance of LGBTQ riches on stage this spring

'The Little Mermaid' at Serenbe, Todrick Hall, Trixie Mattel are highlights

By JIM FARMER

Between theater gigs, special events, comedy, opera and concerts, the spring is a hotbed of LGBTQ offerings.

One of the most-anticipated treats of the season is "Out of Darkness: Two Remain," staged by Atlanta Opera and directed by the company's innovative artistic director, Tomer Zvulun. Composer Jake Heggie's and librettist Gene Scheer's opera, in two acts, deals with Holocaust survivors being visited by ghosts from their past. It's based on true stories by survivors including gay German Jew Gad Beck. The work is being done in collaboration with Theatrical Outfit.

Openly gay comic, actor and YouTube sensation Randy Rainbow is bringing his patented sense of humor to town in April. His musical tribute to the first presidential debate in 2016 was seen by more than 25 million people in just two days, and his comedic videos are starting to pop up everywhere.

Looking for even more laughs? A night with Kathleen Madigan might be the cure. Over her lengthy career, she has been seen on every late night show imaginable, and her comedy show "Gone Madigan" has been seen on Showtime and Netflix. Also look for the queen of mean, funny lady (and gay fave) Lisa Lampanelli, visiting the city next weekend, and the improv madness of "Whose Line is it Anyway?" in May.

Groundbreaking gay artist Todrick Hall follows up a run in Broadway's "Chicago" with his new "American: The Forbidden" world tour, making a stop at the Fox Theatre in May.

An evening of music, comedy and drag is promised at drag goddess Trixie Mattel's Now With Moving Parts Tour, while the Atlanta Ballet's "Bach to Broadway" is set to music by George Gershwin.

Out Front Theatre Company has a slew of events, including a production of the beloved "Sordid Lives" and a new show with "Sordid Lives" creator Del Shores titled "Six Characters in Search of a Play." Other theater highlights include Serenbe Playhouse's "The Little Mermaid" and Actor's Express' "The Color Purple." As well, Aurora Theatre is taking its adorable version of the crowd-pleasing "Mamma Mia!" to the Ferst Center in June after it closes it current run.

Finally, the biggest ticket of the season looks to be the long awaited bow of Lin-Manuel Miranda's "Hamilton," the winner of several Tony Awards and a pop culture phenomenon. It comes to town via the Broadway in Atlanta series and looks to cause the stir here it has everywhere else.

Clockwise from bottom left: 'Out of Darkness: Two Remain,' 'The Little Mermaid' and Trixie Mattel. (Courtesy photos)

Details

Lisa Lampanelli
March 24
Center Stage Theatre

"The Little Mermaid"
March 28 – April 22
Serenbe Playhouse

"Out of Darkness: Two Remain"
April 5 – 15
Atlanta Opera
The Balzer Theatre at Herren's

Randy Rainbow Live
April 12
The Buckhead Theatre

Kathleen Madigan: Boxed Wine and Bigfoot
April 13 – 14
The Buckhead Theatre

Trixie Mattel — Now With Moving Parts Tour
April 23
The Buckhead Theatre

"Sordid Lives"
May 3 – 20
Out Front Theatre

Todrick Hall American: The Forbidden Tour
May 6
Fox Theatre

Whose Line is it Anyway?
May 8
Tabernacle Atlanta

"Bach to Broadway"
May 11 – 13
Atlanta Ballet
Cobb Energy Centre

"Six Characters in Search of a Play"
May 20
Out Front Theatre

"Hamilton"
May 22 – June 10
Fox Theatre

"Mamma Mia!"
June 9 – 24
Ferst Center for the Arts

"The Color Purple"
June 16 – July 29
Actor's Express